

Influenza Vaccine Shortage Prompts New Recommendations for 2004-2005 Season

State health officials are appealing to health care providers to limit use of this year's diminished supply of flu vaccine to immunizing people at high risk from complications of influenza.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued these guidelines for targeting these groups at highest risk from complications of influenza:

- Adults 65 years of age or older
- People 24 months to 64 years of age with chronic medical conditions
- Children 6 to 23 months of age
- Women who are pregnant during influenza season
- Residents of long-term care and nursing home facilities
- Persons 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin therapy
- Health care workers with direct patient contact
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children 0-6 months of age

California-based Chiron Corporation announced October 5 that it will not be able to supply influenza vaccine this year, thus cutting the nation's supply of available flu vaccine by about 50 percent for the 2004-2005 influenza season.

"There is a critical shortage of influenza vaccine this year, and there have been significant changes in the recommendations for vaccine administration," said State Health Commissioner Greg Wilson, M.D., who sent an appeal today to all Indiana physicians to follow the CDC guidelines. "Only by limiting administration of the vaccine to high-risk groups will we be able to protect most of our vulnerable populations."

Wilson said that the public can call the Indiana Family Helpline at (800) 433-0746 for information about the flu vaccination guidelines. **Those interested in receiving flu vaccination should first contact their primary care physician, then their local health department, or go to the ISDH Web site featured page on influenza located at www.statehealth.in.gov/healthinfo/influenza.htm, then click flu clinics. Additional information about influenza is also available on the Web site.**

The ISDH had originally ordered 85,000 doses of influenza vaccine for use this season by local health departments (LHDs) and health care providers participating in the Vaccines for Children Program (VFC). This program provides immunizations to **children less than 19 years of age** who are uninsured or who are insured through Medicaid. LHDs also receive vaccine through Federal Act 317 funding for children not covered by the VFC. The CDC is evaluating options on "transforming" VFC vaccine for use by other populations.

In an October 6 letter to LHDs and other VFC providers, the ISDH discussed how these providers should allocate flu vaccine:

"As of October 5, 2004, the Immunization Program has received 18,330 doses of influenza vaccine (Fluzone), which will be distributed to local health departments and VFC health care providers. The amount of vaccine distributed to providers will be rationed based on the amount of influenza vaccine ordered by each site during the 2003-2004 influenza season. Health care providers will receive approximately 30 percent of last year's doses ordered, or a minimum of 10 doses.

"This vaccine must be prioritized for use in persons in groups listed above, particularly those at increased risk of complications from influenza because of chronic medical conditions, as listed below:

- children who have chronic heart or lung conditions, including asthma
- children who have required regular medical follow-up or hospitalization during the preceding year because of these conditions:
 - diabetes mellitus and other chronic metabolic conditions
 - chronic kidney disease
 - hemoglobinopathies such as sickle-cell disease
 - weakened immune system (caused by medications or by HIV)
 - children and adolescents (ages 6 months-18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy

"The VFC Program is not able to provide the live attenuated nasal spray vaccine, which is licensed for use in persons 5-49 years of age who do not have medical high-risk conditions. However, if available within your practice, the live attenuated influenza vaccine (FluMist) should be used to immunize:

- health care workers working in direct patient care (although not in contact with severely immunocompromised persons)
- healthy individuals 5-49 years of age in close contact with infants 0-6 months of age (household contacts or out-of-home caregivers)."

Other flu vaccine, including vaccine offered to adults, is ordered and dispensed by private providers.

It will be **especially important** this year for people to use other infection control measures to help control flu outbreaks. To prevent the spread of ALL respiratory infections, including influenza, good respiratory hygiene is important. Serious respiratory illnesses like influenza are spread by coughing or sneezing and unclean hands.

- To help stop the spread of germs, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands. Put your used tissue in the wastebasket.
 - To clean your hands after coughing or sneezing, wash with soap and water, or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner.
 - People who experience symptoms of influenza should stay home from work, school, and daycare.
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